

Checklist of Programming Elements that Facilitate Positive Behaviors

Expand and develop appropriate social interactions

Build on social interactions between staff members and each class member, including the student with problem behaviors. Demonstrate positive regard for him or her beyond the current behavior. The student needs to see herself or himself in the group context. Give additional attention when the student shows interest in a topic or is attempting to engage staff appropriately. When off task, steer the student to more appropriate activities through redirection. Do not feed into inappropriate attention seeking by overreacting to disruptive behaviors because it is probable that these are reinforced by adult interest, negativity, and concern.

Facilitate appropriate peer interactions

Use group activities to build positive social interactions among students. Teach appropriate social language, how to reciprocally interact, and strategies for getting attention from others and for getting needs met. Teach appropriate language for social interactions during board games, recess activities, snack time, or group discussions.

Review and rehearse daily schedule

Students with significant memory impairments, some learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, autism, or mental retardation are frequently anxious during change or transition. Over time, they adapt very well to consistent scheduling and routine. Eventually, they internalize most of the routines and can be very resistant to change in that routine. This internalization of routine is a means of control, and a student can become quite agitated, act silly, or be disruptive when he or she experiences unexpected change. One means for compensating for this problem and building in functional academic experience is verbal rehearsal of scheduling. At the start of the day, go over the sequence of classroom activities verbally and pictorially, if possible. The pictures, icons, logos, and line drawings are kept with the student for continuous reference. Sequence, not time, should be the emphasis of these rehearsals, but as an incidental training activity, the time of a particular activity also could be displayed beside the activity. This technique is a concrete and functional approach to reading and time-telling. In addition, it helps to relieve any anxiety associated with change and transition within a hectic or busy environment. This schedule can become a crutch for the individual when he or she cannot receive adult attention at transition time and can be used in preparing the student for change on any given day. Knowing how long he or she has to wait for playtime or free time is important for many students. Coordinate the use of the schedule with other staff members working with the student so that information on the schedule will be accurate. Do not schedule and rehearse events that cannot be delivered reliably. The schedules allow the student greater awareness, but if they are not followed consistently, they will irritate rather than reassure the student.

Review and rehearse classroom rules

Actively teach easily generalized, specific rules. Rule-teaching is a primary strategy for students with difficulties in concept formation and generalization. Rules should be stated as positive and incompatible behaviors, such as "hands and feet to self," rather than "No hitting." They may have to be shown to the student in a very concrete fashion, and they may need to be stated before the student begins work. For example, before beginning the lesson, the teacher might show the student a picture of himself or another student working quietly or point out another student in the class working appropriately. The teacher then would state, "The rule is you must work quietly." The student would then be asked to repeat the rule. The student would be reinforced for following that rule. Initially, only one to two rules should be taught at a time. It is important that the student internalize each rule in turn before others are taught contingently. The student may not always succeed in observing the rule, but the teacher must be emphatic that it should be followed. Reminders of the rule should be given whenever the student does not follow it, but punishment or criticism for disobeying the rule should be avoided. Initially, all work should be judged by the student's ability to follow the rules while working. The quality or quantity of work are not the issue.

As the student acquires rule-driven classroom behavior and exhibits an interest in school work, quality and quantity can be re-evaluated. Also, rehearse appropriate rules and strategies before the student begins activities that may be difficult for the student.

Use schedules within activities to enhance structure It is equally important to build in clear and concrete structure to tasks when asking the student to work independently. Making the student aware of behavioral expectations, task sequence, and duration may be necessary to support focusing on the activity without distraction, undue anxiety, or disruptive and demanding behavior. The use of written or pictorial schedules may be of use here. Schedules can be used situationally to show the order of events within an activity, for example:

1. Use your name stamp on this paper.
2. Circle what we need for this activity.
3. Hand in your work.

Or:

1. Write your name.
2. Do ten addition problems.
3. Hand in your work.

Pictures or line drawings are available through many educational resources, especially through speech and language service providers or in critical/functional skills curricula. If the student can read, short, simple sentences will suffice, with pictures to enhance communication when possible and desirable.

Teach Coping skills

This can be especially effective for use when the student is having difficulty following rules. Teach rules in motivating settings and activities. When the student is involved in motivating activities, remind him or her of the rules for appropriate behavior. Have the student occasionally state the rule when he or she is in danger of not following it. When the student is not involved in motivating activities or when activities become too stimulating or anxiety producing, teach the student to state his or her need to escape: "It's too hard!" or "I need to leave!" or "I need help!" Any verbal explanation that can serve to allow the student to escape in an appropriate manner will do. When the student is aware that he or she has communicatively appropriate options for escaping difficult tasks or for reducing sensory stimuli, then it will be possible to negotiate with a rule, such as, "Try your best!" If the student is agitated or upset, it may prove helpful to teach the student to use a relaxation area, such as a corner with a mat or pillows. It will be necessary to teach the student to use such an area, but it may prove helpful as an additional coping strategy, if consistently used.

Focus whole class on positive behavior

Use the end of the class to comment on positive achievement of all class members. Allow all students to comment on good things they saw others doing. Help others to participate with prompts, such as "Did you see James try his best this morning in group?" Build a classroom spirit around following the classroom rules. Use stickers, applause, praise, additional playtime, or edibles as appropriate when doing this group activity.

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